

Emerson's Transcendentalism

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Emerson's Transcendentalism

JOHN H. COLLINS, S. J.

THE vogue enjoyed by American writers on the other side of the Atlantic has long been of interest to lovers of literature. Men who failed as prophets in their own country were hailed as leaders in their respective spheres by those whose opinion must claim our highest respect. Longfellow, Lowell, Emerson, Bryant, Poe and a host of others drew foreign followings of which any writer of their day might justly be proud. Of the New England writers perhaps no one was more popular than Emerson, the poet and lecturer, whose terse, flashing sentences and thoughtful paragraphs attracted the thinking men of the day, and whose influence is still felt in the works of such writers as W. B. Yeats, John Eglinton and their school of Anglo-Irish literary aspirants. The turning of the nations from the material to the spiritual affords these latter a good theme for their mystic dreaming, while their constant reechoing of Emerson's doctrine and their attempts at solutions of social and economic problems lead us to warn the uninitiated against ideals that have no foundation, against visions and wild imaginings never to be realized, against the worthless faith and false optimism of Emerson and the Transcendental mystics.

With the dawn of the nineteenth century the new American Republic began to take form. The longing for independence first roused at Lexington manifested itself in every department of life. All over the country the tendency seemed to be towards a new world with everything in it new: ideas, modes of living, philosophy and religion. In New England especially, where dwelt most of the nation's thinkers, the philosophical, and consequently the social, political, and religious life became permeated with the longing for freedom from restraint of any kind. Puritan melancholy and severity had had its

day and was fast becoming a myth; the idol, Calvin, had fallen with as great a crash as the first May-pole; men, American men, with blood fired by years of oppression, had refused to accept any longer a God who could cause them such misery and still be good.

The offspring of Puritanism was a reaction against the gloomy conservatism of the parent. American thought, ever susceptible to the new, especially if it be practical, found a haven in Deism, a religion built on the philosophy of Locke. Deism became the fashion of the hour; the nation's leading men eagerly grasped at it; the irritable Jefferson, the imperturbable Franklin and other equally famous fathers of the Declaration saw in it a religion wholly in accord with the idea of freedom and display of individuality with which success in arms had deluged America. Reason, and reason alone, was the beginning, the middle and the end of this blind, unconsoling, unreasonably reasoned doctrine. Deism found its perfect bloom in Unitarianism, a purely human religion which rejected the supernatural and looked on Christ as a man, and only a man, a man, however, in whom human nature broke away from trammels, a man perfect in human virtue, a superman, and so, a leader of future generations. The new religion, like all that preceded it, was the ever-appearing "dissidence of dissent." (For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Father Mahony's "New England Thought," CATHOLIC MIND, No. 20, 1914.)

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

In the atmosphere of such an upheaval the leading thinker of the early nineteenth century was born. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the son of the Rev. William Emerson, himself the seventh of a line of ministers, was born in Boston, May 25, 1803. While the future genius was still a lad, in his native city began that renaissance of learning which later made that city the seat of American intellectual activity. Webster, Everett, Story, Channing Ticknor and their contemporaries found the chief outlet for their burning thoughts in the youthful *North American Review*. It was not long before they were joined by Emerson himself. From his earliest years, Emerson was a scholar. He is described as "a spiritual-looking boy in

blue nankeen, . . . angelic and remarkable." Books were his passion, literature his chief pursuit. Throughout his course at Harvard he was best known for his various attempts at essays, readings and poems, some of which met with more than ordinary success.

When Emerson reached manhood, Unitarianism was at its height. Naturally enough the quiet, angelic New Englander, with traits of the ministry inherited, looked towards the profession of preaching. The year 1826 saw him "approbated to preach," and immediately some of Boston's leading pulpits sought the youthful preacher's services. Thinker as he was, it was not long before Emerson began to seek suitable reasons for the faith that was in him, and in the pursuit of these he hit upon a peculiar development of the fundamental doctrines of Kant and his German followers; the then growing movement of Transcendentalism. This was unfortunate, unfortunate for himself and for America at large, for, certain it is that Emerson has led American thought, and precisely for the reason present-day writers offer to the contrary. It is precisely because Emerson clothed false principles in the garb of poetry and rhetoric, that these same false principles have crept unawares into present-day American thought, American literature and American religion, if that phrase may mean anything, and that, as a result, in the new America we find self-assertion being pushed to the utmost, the "human" exalted to airy heights, and the existence of a personal God questioned by every "thinker" from university professors down to budding sophomores. Emerson's stumbling was unhappy, for in his fall the outstretched hand was weak and sank with him.

ORIGIN OF TRANSCENDENTALISM.

Transcendentalism was the latest form of idealism, a mixture of the German and the English schools, having as its basic principle the old idea traceable to the Orientals, a God's immanence in the universe. Nature, literature, history were but subjective phenomena; each event "a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact" which alone concerned the thinker. It was a reaction against the materialistic tendencies of Deism, a reaction with its own

weak points, which, if pushed too far, would lead again into the errors against which it rebelled. In the course of the previous century Kant, indignant at the trend which skepticism had taken in the writings of Hume, had proclaimed the absolute monarchy of human reason. Meanwhile in France, St. Pierre, de Staël, Constant, Cousin, Jouffroy and others had taken up the cudgel against the materialism of Voltaire, Diderot and the Encyclopedists in general, in an attempt to thwart the growing infidel philosophy and establish once for all an immovable foundation for faith. In America, the intellectual renaissance, fascinated by the spiritualistic tenor of the German, French and later English writers, among whom Coleridge, Wordsworth and Carlyle had worthy places, proved the good ground needed for the seeds of this idealism. The impressionable Emerson absorbed it fully. In it he found that for which his soul was longing, a relief from the social and political unrest of the times, a haven from sordid materialism and unbelief. Just what shape the new philosophy took in his writings, the absorption of its fundamental principles into latter-day American philosophy, and the evils consequent upon such principles, it is the purpose of this paper to expose.

Philosophical systems have ever been divided according to their theories concerning the origin of ideas into the subjective and objective camps. According to the latter, all knowledge comes either directly or indirectly from experience. The former either recognizes no external world at all, or, if admitting one, denies the mind's capability of recognizing it. We may know the types, the images of external reality, but the things in themselves—never. Transcendentalism, as Emerson himself describes it, was "the tendency to respect the intuitions, and to give them all authority over experience." ("Essay on Transcendentalism.") It was more than this; it was, in the words of Frothingham, "an assertion of the immanence of divinity in instinct, the transference of supernatural attributes to the natural constitution." ("Transcendentalism in New England.") It was Pantheism, pure and simple, the identification of God with the universe. Intuition as the origin of ideas was the starting point, but the main stream soon found many outlets. And it is ac-

according to these various explanations of intuition that we may class the various schools. We shall not enumerate the manifold varieties of the system, differing as they did, according to individual taste and disposition. Since this paper is concerned chiefly with Emerson, we shall confine ourselves to his peculiar views on the nature of intuition, pointing out their psychological absurdities and false ethical consequences.

True it is that Emerson was not distinctly a philosopher, but rather a poet. His imagination forbade his delving into metaphysics; this were a study too profane, too earthy for his soaring spirit. Still, to him poetry was "the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of the thing; to pass the brute body, and search the life and reason which *causes* it to exist; to see that the object is always flowing away, whilst the spirit or necessity which *causes* it subsists." ("Essay on Poetry.") Now "the knowledge of things in their last causes" is not the definition of poetry, but of philosophy. Whether or not to Emerson these two were identical, in either case his definition brands him a philosopher. Emerson's very poems show that he could not thrust aside speculation for the mere pleasure of announcing the poet's message, as when in "The Sphinx" he broods over the riddle of man, or when in "Threnody," "Holidays," "May-day" and others he dwells upon the Fate oppressing all men, or again when the pure Pantheism crops out in "Wood-notes," "Brahma" and "Pan." Who, on reading such poetry, will not pause to refresh his wearied brain and ask what manner of poet is this who attempts to solve world-problems within the space of a few measured lines and in the imaginative realm of poetry? We think it untrue to style Emerson a mere poet. He held to a distinct philosophical system, a system eclectic in its make-up, difficult to comprehend, nevertheless distinct and at least approachable.

THE OVER-SOUL.

At the center of this system stands Emerson's doctrine of the Over-soul Man, who, he holds, is made up of two elements, the personal and the impersonal. Each element has its own set of faculties. "We are amphibious creatures, weaponed for two elements, having two sets of faculties, the particular and the catholic." ("Nominalist

and Realist.") Man as a person is weak, liable to error, incapable of raising himself; the impersonal is simple human nature, the great soul, reason, man's yoke-fellow, upon which he must fall back if he wishes to make progress. The more man frees himself from the limitations of personality, the more spiritual, the truer, the better he becomes, until at last he loses himself in the infinite ocean of God. This impersonal nature is the Over-soul, the only one substance, the container of all being; it is God. Wherefore, to obtain knowledge, man must abandon himself to this great soul and its intuitions; to order his actions aright he must follow the dictates of this absolute norm of truth and goodness, which, being Divine, cannot err.

The soul is the vast background of our being, in which they [its organs] lie,—an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the façade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect; but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. ("The Over-soul.")

Throw off your personality and permit yourself to be swallowed up by the spirit that flows into you from on high; accept as true whatever your own mind, opening itself to the great influx, tells you is true; act on that spontaneous instinct which is yours, and you are on the road to perfection. No one can stop you, for you are sure you are right. You are obeying yourself, the highest law, the norm of all truth and all morality.

Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which flows into you as life, place yourself in the full center of that flood, then you are without effort impelled to truth, to right and a perfect contentment. Then you put all gainsayers in the wrong. Then you are the world, the measure of right, of truth, of beauty. ("Essays.")

Primacy of mind is the chief gift of this higher nature to its yoke-fellow, man. "Man carries the world in his head." ("Nature.") "The soul knows all things because it contains all things; its knowledge is the projection of it-

self. We know all things in this one, eternal mind or soul, itself God; as the earlier ontologists said, we look on God and in Him know all. Now there is a sense in which we see all things in God. Not, as the ontologists accused St. Augustine of teaching, that we have an immediate intuition of God and in Him an intuition of all things, but, since the essences of things could neither be or be known unless they first were and were known in the mind of God, we may say we know these essences *in rationibus aeternis*. But all our knowledge of them comes either from the data of sense or from reflection. We are not conscious of such an intuition, just as we are not conscious of the double element in man. In the case of God we are not conscious of an intuition of Him; rather are we conscious that we know Him through created things, as the schoolmen say, *per notas alias*. Neither are all things projections of this vast soul. Emerson throughout his essay on "History" and again in "Nature" proclaims his firm belief that external objects are not real, but apparent. Belief in an external world is for children only. "Seen in the light of thought the world always is phenomenal" ("Nature"), or it is a "Divine dream, from which we may presently awake to the glories and certainties of day." ("Nature.")

FAREWELL TO THE SENSES' TESTIMONY.

Now, if the objects we seem to see outside of us do not really exist as such, then we must bid farewell to the testimony of our senses; we must doubt about everything, even our own mind's capability of attaining truth, we must accuse God of constant and pernicious deception, and become skeptics pure and simple; life will be an enormous sham, virtue a thing merely to be dreamed of, morality a passing whim, while the idealist in his airy fairy castle converses with the great spirit, with God, *his* God, the creation of his own mind, a Being of whom he can know nothing, a Divinity humanly fashioned, a monster and no God at all. Francis Bacon once said, "It is true a little philosophy inclineth men's minds to atheism."

This subtraction of personality from man may mean one of two things, the denial of rationality or the removal of individuality. For a person, according to the accepted

definition, is an individual substance of rational nature. A person must be a substance, that is, he must exist in and act from himself; he must be individual, that is, singular, not universal, incommunicable, not common; he must be rational by nature, to distinguish him from individual irrational substances, as sticks and stones, tree and flower, dog and horse.

This extreme view to which Emerson exposes himself portends intellectual and moral disaster. The impersonal man is man irrational, the man of the senses, or animal instincts, insane or at best a child. Personality comes to dim the child's vision, or hastens to disturb the bliss of the insane who, given up to the "spirit," enjoy perfect contentment. "The poet knows that he speaks adequately, then, only, when he speaks somewhat wildly, . . . not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from service [right reason?] and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life." ("The Poet.")

But we shall not be too radical. We can pardon the trenchant pen of Brownson, himself, for a time, deceived by the lure of Transcendentalism, for interpreting the "impersonal" in this first sense and drawing the logical consequences. Perhaps after all Emerson, the dreamer of dreams, close to the immaterial, whose ambition it was to hitch his wagon to a star, would have shuddered at the bare mention of consequences. Logic he cared not for; it was gross and savored of earth. He saw, and sought nothing else; his was the vision splendid, not to be disturbed by vulgar reasoning. "We must not pick locks. We must check this low curiosity." ("The Over-soul.") In all his seeing one thing he saw not: the utter absurdities to which his preaching might lead and the consequent moral upheaval. Let us take a more favorable interpretation, one that Emerson most likely meant we should take, namely, that the removal of personality means a breaking away from individuality.

PAN-PSYCHIC MONISM.

The absence of individuality leads either to an acknowledgment that the universal exists as something in the physical order, or if not to this, to pan-psychic monism. For, in Emerson's man, the personal element must either be identified with or distinct from the impersonal. If the

two elements are distinct, and you may cast off your personality, thereby losing your individuality, naught is left but a universal, the impersonal, existing by itself. A strange sight it would be to see the genus man walking the streets of our cities, with all marks of individuality tucked away at home or deposited at the nearest pawnbroker's! A universal as such cannot exist in the physical order. A universal of its very nature is at the same time one and capable of being multiplied. Once multiplied, it ceases to be one. Unless, perhaps, a thing may be one and at the same time manifold. Emerson, while logically coming to this, was not so foolish as to demand it. Plainly he meant that the two elements, the personal and the impersonal, were identified in physical man. But if such be the case, the impersonal ceases to be universal. For if my friend and I manifest certain personal qualities by which we may be told apart, no matter how much of the impersonal element each one may possess, we assuredly are numerically two persons, with distinct personalities not to be put off. Despite this, Emerson assigns to the impersonal, properties attributable only to a universal. Nothing is left to hold him to but plain panpsychic monism. And, indeed, this he professed. Everywhere we find passages reminding us that the great soul flows through all nature, that all things, man included, are but the periphery and the spirit the center, parts of "that great nature in which we all rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all others," or the following:

To this schoolboy under the bending dome of day, is suggested that he and it proceed from one root, one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is Root? Is not that the soul of his soul? ("The American Scholar.") "The heart in thee is the heart of all. Thus is the universe alive. These are demonstrations . . . of the genius of nature: they show the direction of the stream. But the stream is blood; every drop is alive." ("Essays," Passion.)

Thus the Over-soul runs through nature, nature itself in its varied forms is but the varied manifestations of the great soul, man being the highest and truest type. The Over-soul, of course, is finally God, so that it is God who permeates all nature, God who unites in Himself all men.

THE ABSURDITIES OF OVER-SOUL.

We pause to take a better view of Emerson's teaching. We have recognized his Transcendentalism as a form of Pantheistic idealism, whose false start lies in a mistaken notion of the origin of ideas, namely, intuition. According to Emerson this intuition is a light from the great spirit, the Over-soul, God Himself, penetrating all things and appearing in man as the impersonal element. Impersonal man, being God, is a law of truth and goodness to himself. To explain the nature of impersonal man, two roads lay open: that of admitting with the ultra-realists, the bitterest foes of idealism, that the universal exists in the order of physical reality, or that of pan-psychic monism. Emerson, already blinded by false first principles, naturally chose the latter, the presence of the Over-soul in all things.

The absurdities of such a doctrine are patent. First of all an appeal to consciousness tells me that I am one subject, remaining the same throughout life. *I am the one* who years ago translated the Odes of Horace, or still farther back, recited the A, B, C. *I am the one* who yesterday took a five-mile walk and today am in the midst of books. Moreover, as I know that other persons distinct from me exist, I immediately infer from the data of consciousness that *I am not others*, and so that *I am not God*. If I were identified with you, I should be at once myself and not myself, for I should be you, or at least part of you; I should be myself and God. Alcott did not disdain taking to himself this honor. "I am God. I am greater than God; God is one of my ideas; I therefore contain God; greater is the container than the contained. Therefore, am I greater than God." What could be more blasphemous? Again, my thoughts would be your thoughts, though both were contradictory. The same thoughts should have been the Kaiser's and President Wilson's. If so, why this terrible war? Republican and Democrat, master and slave, saint and sinner, all should be united in mind. Alas! they are not, and we are forced to use our common-sense, to accept the testimony of consciousness, to shun such vagaries, to live practical lives. Besides, if it is true that I have a conscience, a faculty that tells me I, as an individual distinct from all

others, must do this and must not do that, that I, and I alone, am responsible for my actions of ten or fifteen years ago, then who will identify me with another? Who wants to be identified with the depraved? Who to take upon himself the vices and sins of other men? Panpsychists cannot avoid this. The rest of mankind wishes them well, but will have no part with them.

NATURE OF EMERSON'S "SOUL."

The immortality of the human soul was assumed. Let us not forget the nature of this soul. It was part of the one, great soul pervading all things, limitless, inexhausted and inexhaustible. A man might draw on this soul at will without diminution of the soul's essence. The Transcendentalist held to immortality as a sacred article of faith. It was an essential quality of the great soul, not to be demonstrated by reason, but to be accepted along with the soul's existence. To attempt to arrive at it by a ratiocination were to profane it. Again, "We must not pick locks"; "No inspired man ever asks this question." Up to Emerson's time most men, frightened by Calvinistic threats of punishment hereafter, abhorred death as something terrible; to Emerson it was merely a natural event to be met with firmness by the great-souled. Doubting and fearing about a hereafter was wasting one's life and energy. According to him all "sound" minds rested on a "certain conviction, namely, that if it be best that conscious personal life shall continue, it will continue; if not best, then it will not; and we, if we saw the whole, should, of course, see that it was better so." ("Immortality.") This is his postulate. Do not ask him to prove it. "I am a better believer, and all serious souls are better believers, in the immortality than we can give grounds for. . . . We cannot prove our faith by syllogisms. The argument refuses to form in our mind." (Ibid.)

How, we ask, can Emerson dare to say: "if it be best" and "if not best?" From its very nature as a part of the infinite, the soul itself, best or not best, must live forever. When we revert to Emerson's first principles, we do not wonder that to him immortality was undemonstrable and not needing any proof. He could not but assume it. Here, despite himself, Emerson was for once logical.

It is hope in this species of immortality on which the vaunted Emersonian optimism rests. Such an immortality is not worthy of the name, for by it all individuality is lost, there is no such thing as personal happiness. Of what value is such optimism to the ordinary individual, working for his daily bread, who sees in all the ills of life, in his own numerous mistakes and wanderings, how hard it is to be the announcer of such good tidings to himself? Ask the man in the street to tell himself he is to live forever, to believe it because he himself said it, and to be glad in his knowledge. He must not ask for proofs; he knows it. He will look at you with a sorry, significant smile. He is glad, perhaps, that you know it, glad, too, that he is not like you. But starting from right principles, it is possible to show this honest toiler with a fair amount of clearness that there is a life to come, a life worth living for, a rest from and a reward of his labors. The knowledge thus attained will buoy him up amidst trials, keep his eye and heart fixed upon the eternity beyond, and so, reflected in his outward acts, shed the sunshine and good-cheer of his own being upon his work and upon his fellow-men.

EMERSON'S IDEA OF GOD.

Intimately connected with the idea of the Over-soul and as equally absurd was Emerson's idea of God. That God existed he was certain; an ever-present intuition told him such was true. Unearthing the time-worn postulate of Kant, brought to New England in the translations of German philosophical works, he discarded reason as the one infallible means of proving the existence of God. To employ reason were profane, for did not that moral sentiment inborn in all men tell him there must be some Being to satisfy his yearnings? Sufficient for Emerson to know that this Being existed; how to prove it troubled him little. And yet, reason itself offers more than one convincing proof of this all-important fact, the existence of a Being infinitely superior to the dwellers on this earth: The argument from design, quite sufficient for the ordinary man, the invincible persuasion of men that such a Being exists, or again, and most convincing of all, the proof from created things, the cosmological argument, as

it is called. Here are three sound, intelligible, irrefutable arguments which Emerson, and in fact, all the disciples of Kant, brushed aside as profitless. Rejecting reason, changeless and trustworthy guide, they clung to a moral sentiment, a mere caprice changeable with the winds of environment, and on this based all their knowledge of God, the child of their own fancies, finite, and still Divine.

This God was immanent in the universe. Here again treading in the footsteps of that trio of German Pantheists who immediately followed Kant and drew largely from him, Emerson taught that the Over-soul, the *Weltgeist*, permeated all things, that all things were but manifestations of the great soul, itself God, mere "bubbles on the ocean of infinity," hence Divine, God Himself.

It almost seems as if what was aforesaid spoken fabulously and hieroglyphically, was not spoken plainly, the doctrine, namely, of the indwelling of the Creator in man. ("Nature.") The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. Every natural fact is an emanation and that from which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation. . . . Not the cause, but an ever-novel effect, nature descends always from above. ("Nature.")

We recognize the notorious doctrine of flux, known to the Orientals, taught by Heraclitus, and enunciated today in the writings of Henri Bergson and many of his contemporaries.

The Over-soul, God, the sum of all being, at the core of Emerson's Transcendentalism, merits the name of unadulterated Pantheism, an identification of God and the world, the reconciling of finite and infinite, the cheapest of absurdities, because a violation of the first principle of philosophy as well as of common-sense, namely, that contradictories cannot be true at one and the same time. Of course, such an idea of God had its advantages. It is flattering to know that God is indwelling in you. How sweet to think that one is Divine, abiding with Deity, a law unto himself, incapable of error! Ever since the exodus from Eden a high opinion of one's own powers has been pleasing to the individual, and the Pantheist cannot claim exemption. The poor, deluded man-god! If he but knew the nature of pride, that well-nigh unpardonable sin, so fittingly described by a writer of Emer-

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NATURE OF EMERSON'S "SOUL."

The immortality of the human soul was assumed. Let us not forget the nature of this soul. It was part of the one, great soul pervading all things, limitless, inexhausted and inexhaustible. A man might draw on this soul at will without diminution of the soul's essence. The Transcendentalist held to immortality as a sacred article of faith. It was an essential quality of the great soul, not to be demonstrated by reason, but to be accepted along with the soul's existence. To attempt to arrive at it by a ratiocination were to profane it. Again, "We must not pick locks"; "No inspired man ever asks this question." Up to Emerson's time most men, frightened by Calvinistic threats of punishment hereafter, abhorred death as something terrible; to Emerson it was merely a natural event to be met with firmness by the great-souled. Doubting and fearing about a hereafter was wasting one's life and energy. According to him all "sound" minds rested on a "certain conviction, namely, that if it be best that conscious personal life shall continue, it will continue; if not best, then it will not; and we, if we saw the whole, should, of course, see that it was better so." ("Immortality.") This is his postulate. Do not ask him to prove it. "I am a better believer, and all serious souls are better believers, in the immortality than we can give grounds for. . . . We cannot prove our faith by syllogisms. The argument refuses to form in our mind." (*Ibid.*)

How, we ask, can Emerson dare to say: "if it be best" and "if not best?" From its very nature as a part of the infinite, the soul itself, best or not best, must live forever. When we revert to Emerson's first principles, we do not wonder that to him immortality was undemonstrable and not needing any proof. He could not but assume it. Here, despite himself, Emerson was for once logical.

It is hope in this species of immortality on which the vaunted Emersonian optimism rests. Such an immortality is not worthy of the name, for by it all individuality is lost, there is no such thing as personal happiness. Of what value is such optimism to the ordinary individual, working for his daily bread, who sees in all the ills of life, in his own numerous mistakes and wanderings, how hard it is to be the announcer of such good tidings to himself? Ask the man in the street to tell himself he is to live forever, to believe it because he himself said it, and to be glad in his knowledge. He must not ask for proofs; he knows it. He will look at you with a sorry, significant smile. He is glad, perhaps, that you know it, glad, too, that he is not like you. But starting from right principles, it is possible to show this honest toiler with a fair amount of clearness that there is a life to come, a life worth living for, a rest from and a reward of his labors. The knowledge thus attained will buoy him up amidst trials, keep his eye and heart fixed upon the eternity beyond, and so, reflected in his outward acts, shed the sunshine and good-cheer of his own being upon his work and upon his fellow-men.

EMERSON'S IDEA OF GOD.

Intimately connected with the idea of the Over-soul and as equally absurd was Emerson's idea of God. That God existed he was certain; an ever-present intuition told him such was true. Unearthing the time-worn postulate of Kant, brought to New England in the translations of German philosophical works, he discarded reason as the one infallible means of proving the existence of God. To employ reason were profane, for did not that moral sentiment inborn in all men tell him there must be some Being to satisfy his yearnings? Sufficient for Emerson to know that this Being existed; how to prove it troubled him little. And yet, reason itself offers more than one convincing proof of this all-important fact, the existence of a Being infinitely superior to the dwellers on this earth: The argument from design, quite sufficient for the ordinary man, the invincible persuasion of men that such a Being exists, or again, and most convincing of all, the proof from created things, the cosmological argument, as

it is called. Here are three sound, intelligible, irrefutable arguments which Emerson, and in fact, all the disciples of Kant, brushed aside as profitless. Rejecting reason, changeless and trustworthy guide, they clung to a moral sentiment, a mere caprice changeable with the winds of environment, and on this based all their knowledge of God, the child of their own fancies, finite, and still Divine.

This God was immanent in the universe. Here again treading in the footsteps of that trio of German Pantheists who immediately followed Kant and drew largely from him, Emerson taught that the Over-soul, the *Weltgeist*, permeated all things, that all things were but manifestations of the great soul, itself God, mere "bubbles on the ocean of infinity," hence Divine, God Himself.

It almost seems as if what was aforetime spoken fabulously and hieroglyphically, was not spoken plainly, the doctrine, namely, of the indwelling of the Creator in man. ("Nature.") The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. Every natural fact is an emanation and that from which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation. . . . Not the cause, but an ever-novel effect, nature descends always from above. ("Nature.")

We recognize the notorious doctrine of flux, known to the Orientals, taught by Heraclitus, and enunciated today in the writings of Henri Bergson and many of his contemporaries.

The Over-soul, God, the sum of all being, at the core of Emerson's Transcendentalism, merits the name of unadulterated Pantheism, an identification of God and the world, the reconciling of finite and infinite, the cheapest of absurdities, because a violation of the first principle of philosophy as well as of common-sense, namely, that contradictories cannot be true at one and the same time. Of course, such an idea of God had its advantages. It is flattering to know that God is indwelling in you. How sweet to think that one is Divine, abiding with Deity, a law unto himself, incapable of error! Ever since the exodus from Eden a high opinion of one's own powers has been pleasing to the individual, and the Pantheist cannot claim exemption. The poor, deluded man-god! If he but knew the nature of pride, that well-nigh unpardonable sin, so fittingly described by a writer of Emer-

son's own day! An attempt to build to heaven will ever have the same result; confusion and final abandonment. It has been well said that pride is the root of all evil.

We say that Pantheism is a contradiction, and we speak the truth. Still we must not deny that God is present in a most intimate manner in each and every one of His creatures. Every Christian, by the God-given light of faith, beholds his God in every person, in every thing, everywhere. The tiniest streamlet, the mighty river flowing to the sea, and the wide expanse of ocean speak His endless glory; the giant mountains, enclosing within their rocky walls innumerable valleys smiling in abundance, all the land teeming with life, with bird and tree and flower, remind us of His wondrous beauty; field and forest, land and sea, sun, moon, and stars, shrieking winds and crashing thunders, all proclaim His absolute, irresistible power; the whole universe, from the highest heaven to middle earth, the gift of a bounteous Creator, chant incessant songs of praise to their Almighty Maker.

GOD'S THREE-FOLD PRESENCE.

The Creator of all things is present in His universe in a three-fold manner. He is present in all things by His power, because all things are subject to Him, from His hand they came, His instruments they remain for the end He intended in creating them; He is present in all things by His essence, since being their Creator and Conserver, He cooperates with all His creatures; not a blade of grass that sprouts, not a flower that blooms, not a bird that pipes of spring, nor a tree that shoots forth young branches, not the simplest action of man nor the creations of giant intellects, but God is there, also, entirely performing the action, giving power, helping, and conserving; lastly, He is in all things by His presence, because He knows and sees all things; the past, the present, the future, all things possible under heaven, He sees in His one eternal act of vision—nothing hidden, not even the most secret thought, but all things manifest to the sleepless eye of His Divine knowledge. But in what does this differ from Pantheism? In just this, that the Pantheist confuses matter with spirit, God with the world, makes everything one and the same Divine substance; the Chris-

tion believes in a real and essential distinction between Creator and creature. For the latter every individual possesses his own personality just as God possesses His; for the Pantheist everyone's personality is lost, swallowed up in the one only substance he calls God; in the one case identity, in the other, distinction.

From what has been said we may gather Emerson's idea of God and of man. His was the God of Pantheism, an infinite Being really identified with the finite productions of His hand. Man as impersonal, was God; as personal, God, too, but less a god. Between these two beings, God and man, certain relations existed so that as in the world today and from the beginning, man had certain obligations to fulfil, certain rights he might insist upon, certain duties towards God, towards himself, and towards his fellow-men. Emerson, like all before him, speculated not for mere speculation's sake, but to find a possible solution for the riddle of life; he sought to aid man to order his actions aright, to live well and to die calmly. But his doctrine, if followed out logically, is rather subversive of all order. Not that Emerson himself was not a good man; on the contrary, his contemporaries found him a man of faultless character, who lived to a ripe old age in manifest peace and serenity. His life, like that of many another father of false doctrine, gave the lie to his teaching. His inconsistency saved him. Those who followed him, however, were not loath to grasp at a doctrine so flattering to their pride, so pampering to their love of ease and so helpful in their pursuit of unbounded liberty. We shall not attempt a detailed exposure of the many avenues of error opened up, or rather kept open, by the teachings of Emerson. Such a task could not be compassed within the limits of this paper. Sufficient to indicate the leading ethical principles of Transcendentalism, their logical tendencies and their actual assimilation into modern American thought.

THE ETHICS OF TRANSCENDENTALISM.

Ethics is that "science which investigates the right ordering of human action in so much as this knowledge can be acquired by the first principles of reason." It is a science which treats of man's last end, of the good, of

virtue, of right and of liberty; the rights and duties of the individual, the family, and society. Man, we know, was created for God's honor and glory. He is destined for perfect happiness, that is, for the perfect knowledge and love of God. To attain this perfect happiness, his must be a life of actions leading to his God-appointed end; that is, actions in keeping with his rational nature; anything degrading this nature turns him away from his last end. The Samaritan who stopped on his journey to comfort a total stranger, who had been robbed and beaten, performed an action in keeping with the nature of man, whose duty it is to aid those in distress. His act, accordingly, has been called good by succeeding generations. At the same time, the action of the robbers, the crime of those who oppress the poor and defraud laborers of their just wages are abominable in the sight of God and man; such acts are out of harmony with rational nature, opposed to the end intended by God in creating man, a perversion of liberty, and meriting the wrath of a just, though merciful, God. The norm, then, for judging the goodness of an action is its conformity with man's rational nature. A human action is that peculiar to man as man, that is, one containing knowledge, deliberation and freedom of choice. This freedom of choice raises man above the condition of the brute; it enables him to propose an end to himself, to lay up greater and greater merit accordingly as his actions are well-ordered. Liberty is man's most precious possession, this he prizes above all gifts. The nations of the world are now allied against a set of men who would impose upon the world the rule of might and oppression. Everywhere an infringement on man's liberty is met with vehement rebuke.

Emerson denied the freedom of man's will. Man for him was headed in one direction and could not escape that Destiny which never swerved, never yielded him the helm, that patient Daemon, who had his way and never allowed man his!

Our moral nature is vitiated by any interference of our will. People represent virtue as a struggle, . . . and the question is everywhere vexed, when a noble nature is commended: Whether the man is not better who strives with temptation? But there is no merit in the matter. Either God is there or he is not there. ("Spiritual Laws.")

It is in his poems, those super-productions of his inspired self, that this utter dependence on a blind force most of all manifests itself. Pitiable, indeed, is it to hear one so great-souled crying out in the despair of the "The Sphinx" and "Threnody." He cannot better his condition. He is not free, but must follow the course marked out by a relentless Deity, whose hand ever points to the goal appointed from eternity. And since for an action to be imputable, man must, of his own accord, choose his own course, neither praise nor blame can accrue to him from any of his own actions. Hence an opening for such vagaries of modern society as the cry that "circumstances and not the man are to blame for crime," and the many what-nots of sentimentalists, social uplifters, and an army of soap-box orators.

EMERSON'S "OPTIMISM."

The work of man's life was culture, a perfect evolution, a striving after a happiness purely natural. Death was a mere passing into another state of being, a pouring of finite into infinite, a return to God, from whom all things proceed. Just what this new state was to be no one could tell.

Here we drift, like white sail across wild ocean, now bright on the wave, now darkling in the trough of the sea, but from what port did we sail? Who knows? Or to what port are we bound? Who knows? ("Lecture on the Times.")

Optimism this, of a very peculiar brand. We are going somewhere, but whither? Who knows? Perhaps into space, there to flit about until the great soul in us finds a habitation in another being; perhaps to that immortal sea which brought us hither; whose course was broken for a time by the jutting-out of life's dry earth, but whose dancing waves now receive us back to their bosom forever.

Self, of course, was the norm of good actions. By virtue of the Over-soul man felt within him a certain moral sentiment, a peculiar spontaneity which led him to perform some actions and to avoid others. Live a life true to the manhood that is in you, was the one dogma of the Transcendentalist. The hereafter will take care of itself.

The height, the deity of man is to be self-sustained, to need no gift, no foreign force, . . . Let the soul be erect, and all things will go well. . . . We have yet no man

who has leaned entirely on his own character, and eaten angel's food; who, trusting to his sentiments, found life made of miracles; who, working for universal aims, found himself fed he knew not how; clothed, sheltered and weaponed he knew not how, and yet it was done by his own hands. Only in the instinct of the lower animals, we find the suggestion of the method of it, and something higher than our understanding. ("The Transcendentalist.")

All this power in man and still no power to use it, no freedom, but a blind necessity driving him on! This is that poisonous self-culture, the outcome of a purely natural philosophy, offered by German philosophers and swallowed by the "thinkers" of America, until today one finds it sugar-coated and of slightly different hue in nearly every non-Catholic university in the land. From the lecture-hall it passes to all classes of society, to rich and poor, old and young. Social reformers see its tendencies, but themselves carry its first principle too far. The principle of private judgment must be dethroned, and in its place a sound philosophy substituted, a system based on objective truth, not on a merely subjective norm; we must meet facts as they are in themselves, not as colored by our own vague imaginings; our duties to God and our fellow-men must not be those only which please us; in a word, we are not, as Emerson taught, the infallible norm of goodness and truth, but rather weak, fallible individuals, wholly dependent on an Almighty Creator, individuals whose minds and wills are easily darkened when they would be something of themselves.

EVERY MAN A NORM TO HIMSELF.

Emerson's legacy to his American admirers was that precious heirloom fashioned by Kant, passed on by Schelling, Hegel, Goethe and other German writers, and eagerly cherished by its latest heirs in the New World, the absolute dominance over all others of the subjective norm of truth, the right of private judgment. When we say that Emerson has influenced American thought, we do not claim him as the father of American philosophy. Far from it. He learned much from others. But we do mean this, that as Emerson's writings have been read far and wide during the last half of the nineteenth century, and since the kernel of these writings is the Kantian tenet that every man is a norm unto himself, Emerson has been

one of the chief instruments in perpetuating this pernicious teaching, at present the very core of American thought, American literature, American religion and American life.

Such doctrine is most destructive to religion and morals. If truth is one thing today and another thing tomorrow, if I may believe and do whatever seems good and useful for me here and now, then there is no such thing as religious dogma, no such thing as constant moral laws. These vary with the mood of the individual. The American character, restless, always rushing out for the new, willingly accepts this fascinating doctrine with its disregard for God and duty, its utilitarian principles and loose code of morals. Literature in every form keeps it ever fresh. Young and old have it thrust before their eyes in novels, magazines and newspapers. And worst of all, they enjoy it. They see not the evil for the garb it wears. Hence the popular cry that all religions are equally good, if they suit the tastes of those professing them. Hence the sad tales of the divorce courts, homes ruined and families divided; hence Godless systems of education in our public schools, and the absurd theories of child development; hence, too, the absolute unrest of the masses, the strained relations of labor and capital; all these strike their roots in a false system of philosophy, which refuses to make the mind square with facts, but strives its utmost to manage the world according to its own selfish way of thinking.

The one remedy at hand is disregarded, scoffed at, and made subject for attack. This remedy is the Church of Christ, founded on a rock, teaching one and the same doctrine the world over and for all time, against whom the gates of hell shall not prevail. In her faith alone may men find that peace of conscience they vainly seek in purely human institutions.

The Lourdes Miracles

Hilaire Belloc.

An Address Reported by the "London Universe."

Some thirty to forty years ago what was the attitude towards Lourdes? Among Catholics were those who said: "I am not bound by the Faith to believe that miracles have taken place at Lourdes." The non-Catholic said: "There is a place called Lourdes to which superstitious people go and think miracles are worked. They do not take place at all, and that is the end of it." Then if they advanced twenty years they would find a great change. The Catholic was quite convinced, and we were proud of these miracles as a triumph of Our Lady and the Catholic Faith. The non-Catholic said: "There is a place called Lourdes to which pilgrimages take place of people who desire to be cured of their ailments by what they believe to be a miraculous or magical water. Certainly, astonishing things do take place, but they take place through what I have been told to call 'auto-suggestion.'" That was the change. They no longer had the skeptical Catholic apologizing as he did twenty years before, and they no longer had the non-Catholic denying the objective reality of the Lourdes miracles; and what others termed "objective reality" Catholics called the truth.

Lourdes was the thing that changed the mind of modern Europe with regard to miracles. Lourdes was the thing that broke up the old materialism of what was called the Victorian era. Lourdes it was that began to make the mass of skeptical Europe consider whether there was not will rather than matter behind the universe; and, although it was a matter of which nobody could pretend to have any specific knowledge, there was something particularly Prudential about the way in which the time and the method of the Lourdes miracles were chosen. In putting that thesis before them, he must warn them of the eccentricity, the abnormality, the apparent phantasy of the Catholic point of view. His thesis was abnormal, eccentric and individual, but he was quite determined on it, and he thought it was one that posterity would accept. They must first understand the state of mind in which Europe was from 1845 to 1885; and when he spoke of the mind of Europe, he referred to that select body called in Russia the "*intelligenzia*" and in France the "intellectuals." The attitude of these people was curiously compounded of materialism and determinism; they said that there was a process or sequence in nature which excluded the action of the will and the personality which were only a function of matter. They denied, implicitly, the existence of a personal God; they certainly denied will at the back of the universe, and hence they denied miracles. Renan and Huxley converged in the ineradicable faith that what they called the processes of the material

world were unalterable, and therefore will was not present among them.

Upon this state of mind there fell the phenomenon of Lourdes in 1858. It fell just at the moment when the adverse wave of materialism was at its height. Lourdes was a special and Providential act, designed to convert, change, upset and disintegrate the materialism of the nineteenth century. A peasant child—and a peasant was thought the last word in unintelligence—said she had seen Our Lady. The ecclesiastical authorities of the district regarded the statement as extravagant and even absurd. Then followed certain miraculous cures. When the ecclesiastical authorities said "This thing is true, after all," when the pilgrimages began to increase, when the cures could not be denied, the "intellectuals" were troubled, and at first with all the traditions of the eighteenth century behind them, simply denied the phenomena. Then there came a certain phase in which the thing could no longer be doubted. There was taking place without a doubt as an ordinary fact of daily experience, demonstrated by all the forms of measurement, the rapid cure of ailments which could not be cured rapidly by any natural means; and now and then there occurred the cure of ailments that could not be cured at all by any natural means.

Lourdes a Blow at Victorian Materialism.

The first book which disturbed the "intellectuals"—the scientific mind of Europe, as they were pleased to call themselves—was that published at Nancy in 1883 by Bernheim, and in that book was the first solid explanation of the theory of what has since been called "auto-suggestion." That book was the starting-point from which people began to say: "These things do happen, after all." 1889 was the date on which the seed sown at the Grotto of Lourdes began to work; for that was the date when the scientific mind of Europe began to say: "These things do happen." That was what occurred to the "intellectuals." The European mind had been changed from a dogmatic denial of supernatural phenomena to that of admission: "These things do happen, after all." The whole materialistic and deterministic attitude had gone by the board, and it was Lourdes, and Lourdes alone, that did it; it was the perpetual stream of phenomena at Lourdes that wore down and pressed to the dust and left for nothing the skepticism and the intellectuality of Europe.

Let them suppose for a moment that it had been proposed to someone endowed with the necessary powers to produce a series of miracles which would have converted that skeptical temper of the middle of the nineteenth century! Suppose a great saint had been told that God would give him power to work those miracles most likely to affect the mind of Europe at this materialistic time. He could not have

- chosen a method more powerful than that which Almighty God chose through the action of Our Blessed Lady in the Grotto and through the water of Lourdes. Had there been the occurrence of sporadic miracles in Europe—among nations universally and habitually devoted, such as the Poles and the Irish, it would have been easy to say, "These people will believe anything."

Again, had it taken the form of some monstrous mechanical event—something of gigantic immensity, that would not have converted the modern mind. In the presence of such a phenomenon as that the modern mind would have questioned the original evidence. But there was Lourdes, which had Providential circumstances connected with it. The phenomenon was reiterated. They were now living sixty years after the first phenomenon, and they were still going on, a perpetual—not an increasing—and reiterated stream of facts. The length of the life of a man was covered by what had been done there. Unquestionably Lourdes had attached itself to the human heart. It might sound a paradoxical statement, but it was true that men were more moved to conviction by a miracle consonant with human needs than by a purely mechanical, non-human, incident of a marvelous type. Had these miracles happened in a Protestant country they would have been boycotted; happening as they did in France, on a place on a railway, in the full light of Europe, they could not be boycotted; they became matter for acute discussion.

There was one particular characteristic of Lourdes which particularly concerned Catholics. This great lever for the change of the human mind and for the conversion of Europe was connected with Our Blessed Lady—God's instrument for that tremendous force. That gave one to think. Supposing that those miracles had happened at the Holy Places in Jerusalem. What a handle that would have been. People would have said: "The tradition of Christ is to us all; and the Catholic Church is but a sect." Had these miracles occurred with *éclat* at the tomb of some local saint they could see how local jealousies would have arisen, and how foreigners would have sneered at the superstition of that place; men would have speculated upon them as psychological phenomena, and nothing would have followed. But they came in direct connection with the Mother of God. They appealed by their objective evidence to Catholics, they appealed subjectively to what we owed to Our Blessed Lady; they stirred our faith and convinced the reason of others; and the two forces converged.

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